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## We Suggest

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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

Bruner, Jerome S., Jolly, Alison, and Sylvia, Kathy  
*Play—Its Role in Development and Evolution*  
New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976. Pp. 716.

School, separated from work which itself has grown difficult to understand, becomes its own world . . . .

How can a system for preparing the immature for entry into the society deal with a future that is increasingly difficult to predict within a single lifetime? . . . .

I would only urge that in considering these deep issues of educability we keep our perspective broad and remember that the human race has a biological past from which we can read lessons for the culture of the present. We cannot adapt to everything, and in designing a way to the future we would do well to examine again what we are and what our limits are. Such a course does not mean opposition to change but, rather, using man's natural modes of adapting to render change both as intelligent and as stable as possible.

“Who would dare study play?” question the editors of this book, indicating that there have been many serious men from varied disciplines and sciences who have tried to do just that. This is not a book for quick, easy perusal or reading. Papers included here have been edited so they may be understood and enjoyed by the general reader, yet contain enough description of research and data analysis for the serious students of animal and human behavior. The volume brings together a body of literature, much of which has appeared in specialized journals, with major emphasis upon the crucial role of play in human child development and its function as a “natural mode of adaptation.” Articles in Part I deal with emerging evolutionary trends in the primate order. Part II proceeds with sections that concern play and its relationship to the world of objects and tools. Part III continues with discussions of play and the social world; while Part IV concludes with considerations of how play is related to the world of symbols, and to its civilizing functions. Particularly intriguing are those articles illustrating the rich connection existing between play and human culture and those pointing out the parallelism found in the rule-bound structure on play and the rule-bound structure of language.

Researchers in the area of play behavior have observed that play satisfies certain needs and incentives of children during critical periods of growth toward effective, comfortable living in the social world. These needs and incentives change as children grow. Understanding relationships between the distinctive features of the types of activity called play and the special character of these incentives can aid insight into the socializing, maturing

processes. As writers in this book have described the generalization from their explorations into the nature of play, they have delineated general features and characteristics of play behavior. Some which might be recognizable and helpful in education are:

1. Reduction/neutralization of pressures of goal-directed action, or the “push” to successful completion of an act;
2. Minimizing of consequences of actions, and learning, with much less risk-taking involved;
3. Provision for opportunities to try combinations of behavior that, under functional pressure, would never be tried;
4. Use of rules systems in which cultural restraints are substituted for operation of impulse;
5. Provision for encounters to aid in mastery of language constituents;
6. Engagement in perceptual and intellectual activities for their own sake, not for any biological function that can be clearly recognized;
7. Presence of an emotional element of pleasure;
8. Derivation of satisfaction from the process, rather than from the product;
9. Freedom to notice seemingly irrelevant detail, often a preliminary step to “discovery;” and
10. Voluntary, self-initiated action.

More accurate and ready recognition of the general features of play leads to greater awareness of its essential, unique role in an individual's growth toward potential maturity.

Other implications from discoveries about play could be of vital importance to educational agencies and institutions in development of curriculums and programs that utilize natural modes of adaptation for more intelligent, stable means of changing behavior. Investigations about play reveal that animals with complex forms of adaptation require youthful play to practice a variety of behaviors, to supplement insufficient hereditary endowment. In view of coming life tasks, they require individual experience to deal with situations for which inherited instinct might not be wholly adequate. Because engaging in play provides a temporary moratorium on frustration, it allows for experimentation, and such activity can be sustained over a long period of time. Individuals have opportunity to practice the “unusual” assembly of objects and actions, resulting in organized/flexible problem solving. Their involvement in creating imaginary situations can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought. In reality, much of the scientific knowledge people use today to master their worlds has arisen from playful activities conducted in a free field, for their own sake.

Further, it has been pointed out that real civilization cannot live in the absence of a certain play element. Play between mother and offspring during the very early years is a prerequisite for the offspring's later interaction with members of its species. Play during later years prepares the individual for competitive and cooperative roles, and for the conventions which govern interaction between members of society. Disruption or denial

of play in childhood leads to abnormal peer reactions, poor control of aggression/inappropriate aggression, and general incompetence in social situations.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Erik Erikson calls the play of children “an infinite resource of what is potential in man.” He predicts:

Unless his gifts and his society have on each step provided the adult with a semblance of an arena of free interplay, no man can hope to reach the potential maturity of old age . . . .

Then, he cautions that adults playing too hard at playing, “simulating naturalness, honesty, and intimacy may end up being everybody and yet nobody,” and that:

. . . . we must always also be receptive to new forms of interplay; and we must always come back to the children and learn to recognize the signs of unknown resources which might yet flourish in the vision of one mankind on one earth and its outer reaches.